B. Participants

3. The high-level round table provides an opportunity for high-level representatives of Member States attending the fifty-sixth session of the Commission to engage in dialogue and share experiences and lessons learned. The representatives may include: ministers of women's affairs; ministers of agriculture and rural development; heads of national mechanisms for gender equality; and senior officials from other relevant ministries, such as those of environment, education, labour, trade, industry, science and technology, development, foreign affairs, finance, health and energy, as well as national statistical offices. The round table will be open to other members of the Commission and observers.

C. Timing

4. The high-level round table will be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 27 February 2012, from 3 to 6 p.m.

D. Format

5. To allow for interaction among as many participants as possible, the round table will be conducted simultaneously in two parallel meetings on the same theme.

6. The chairs of the two parallel meetings will guide the discussions with a view to promoting the interactive nature of the round table. Interventions shall not exceed three minutes. Speakers will be encouraged to ask questions and offer comments on interventions made during the dialogue. Written statements are strongly discouraged.

7. A senior official from an entity of the United Nations system and a representative of civil society will provide comments at the end of the dialogue. The chairs will then close the meetings.

E. Outcome

8. The outcome of the high-level round table will be presented in a summary by the Chair.

III. Elements for discussion in the high-level round table

A. Background

9. The issues covered in the Commission's priority theme for 2012 have, to different degrees and from particular perspectives and approaches, been part of past intergovernmental discussions and outcomes. The main policy instruments and guidance are summarized below.

10. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women,[1] called upon Governments to formulate and implement policies and programmes that support rural women's role in agriculture and fisheries and natural resource management. The Platform for Action called for Governments to formulate and implement policies and programmes that enhance the access of rural women to productive resources, including land, property and inheritance; financial services; extension and marketing services; decent employment and income-generating activities; technology; and markets. It also encouraged specific economic, social, agricultural and related policies supporting female-headed households.

11. The Platform for Action stressed the need to ensure rural women's access to education and training, health services and infrastructure and called upon Governments to allocate the financial, technical and human resources necessary to develop the agricultural and fishing sectors. It called for the generation and dissemination of data on women's unpaid work and the inclusion of such data in national accounting systems. Greater focus should also be placed on strengthening institutional capacities to improve the effectiveness of anti-poverty programmes directed towards the poorest and most disadvantaged groups of women, including rural women. Another key area is the promotion of producer-owned, market-based cooperatives.

12. The General Assembly, in its resolution S-23/3, acknowledged that the majority of the world's women are subsistence producers and users of environmental resources who play a vital role in providing food security and nutrition. Yet, disproportionate numbers of rural women live in poverty. Governments called for the implementation of gender-sensitive national poverty reduction programmes that guarantee rural women's access to and control over economic resources, including property, finance, credit and traditional savings schemes, information, technology and markets. They stressed the need to integrate gender in agricultural and environmental policies and mechanisms and to ensure that national legislative and administrative reform processes, including those related to land reform, decentralization and reorientation of the economy, promote rural women's rights.

13. To support their efforts, Governments invited the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors to review and monitor the impact of health sector reform initiatives on rural women and to ensure that such reforms secure full and equal access to available, affordable and high-quality health care and services for all women, taking into account their diverse needs. They urged regional and international organizations, including the United Nations system, international financial institutions and other actors, to adopt measures to ensure that the work of rural women, especially in the informal sector, is recognized and valued in order to enhance their economic security, their access to and control over resources and credit schemes, services and benefits and their empowerment.

14. During its fiftieth session, in 2011, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women adopted a general statement on rural women in which it called for: integrating gender-sensitive perspectives in rural development

[1] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

strategies, policies and programmes; involving rural women in all aspects of policy-making; promoting full employment and decent work; reducing women's labour through infrastructure and technological innovation; and increasing rural women's awareness of their rights.

15. Various agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women addressed issues related to the situation of rural women. The General Assembly has discussed the improvement of the status of women in rural areas on a biennial basis for many years and has recognized the crucial role of rural women in enhancing agricultural and rural development, ensuring food security and eradicating rural poverty. The Economic and Social Council, in its Ministerial Declaration adopted in 2010, called for concerted action to support rural women's economic empowerment.

16. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women also recognizes the significant role rural women play in ensuring the economic survival of their families through their paid and unpaid work. Article 14 urges States parties to ensure that rural women participate in and benefit equally from rural development by enforcing their right to participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels. The Convention calls for rural women's equitable access to adequate health-care facilities, social security programmes, formal and non-formal education and training, including functional literacy and extension services, agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform, as well as in land resettlement schemes. It advocates for rural women's participation in all community initiatives and their enjoyment of adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications. It also calls for their right to organize self-help groups and cooperatives to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment and self-employment.

17. Other key global development frameworks, such as Agenda 21, adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development,[2] the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (see General Assembly resolution 55/2), the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development,[3] the 2005 World Summit Outcome (see resolution 60/1), the outcome of the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals (see resolution 65/1), and the Istanbul Programme of Action,[4] have also recognized the need for increased attention to rural development, gender equality and women's empowerment.

[2] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II. See chap. 24 of Agenda 21, on global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development.

[3] *Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development, Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.II.A.7 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[4] Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020, *Report of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Istanbul, Turkey, 9-13 May 2011* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 11.II.A.1), chap. II.

B. Discussion guide

18. During the round table, high-level representatives from Member States are expected to focus on actions taken, lessons learned, achievements and good practices, as well as gaps and challenges, with supporting data where available, with respect to implementation at the national level of commitments on the priority theme. The reports of the Secretary General on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges (E/CN.6/2012/3) and on progress in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development, implementation and evaluation of national policies and programmes, with a particular focus on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges (E/CN.6/2012/4) discuss relevant issues related to the priority theme of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The meeting will discuss actions undertaken and results achieved in:

(a) Ensuring that food security and rural women are prioritized in national development plans, poverty reduction strategies, sectoral policies, land reforms and current and future financing on agriculture and rural development. This includes ensuring the availability and analysis of data disaggregated by gender to inform the development of sound national strategies, policies, and programmes;

(b) Expanding rural women's access to economic opportunities and assets, such as land, wage employment, financing, markets and infrastructure, and to essential services. This also involves creating an enabling environment for more sustainable markets and less price volatility;

(c) Reducing the burden of women's unpaid work by providing improved infrastructure, labour-saving and productivity-enhancing technologies, and services that provide care for children, the elderly and the vulnerable in rural areas;

(d) Leveraging rural women's leadership by ensuring their adequate representation and participation at all decision-making levels, including in farmers' organizations and land reform and land allocation committees, and in relevant policy forums on agriculture and rural development.